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#261

STATEMENT BY CITIZENS LEAGUE TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE COORDINATION

Subject: Organization and Staffing of the Minnesota Legislature

Last week the new leadership of the House and Senate for the 1973 Legislature announced the formation of a permanent, bi-partisan, Joint Committee on Legislative Coordination. This is an encouraging sign that the Minnesota Legislature is prepared to implement the concept of House-Senate coordination of legislative services.

As recommended by the Legislature's Interim Committee on Flexible Sessions, the Joint Committee will be responsible for such functions as: setting meeting schedules and establishing legislative deadlines (passage of the flexible session amendment, in effect, requires that both must now be decided jointly by the Legislature) and proposing joint rules for the Legislature.

Such a group was proposed by the Citizens League in its 1968 report on the organization of the Legislature.

The establishment of the Joint Committee suggests -- and provides the framework for -- other important questions. We recommend that the Legislature:

1. Consolidate the functions of the Joint Committee and the Legislative Services Commission.

The Legislature, in 1969, took an important step toward coordination of services when it established, by law, the Legislative Services Commission and assigned to it responsibility for administering the Joint Legislative Reference Library. With the creation of the Joint Coordinating Committee, the Legislature, in effect, has two bodies responsible for coordinating services and operations of the Legislature.

The functions of the Joint Committee and the Legislative Services Commission should be consolidated into one statutory commission. One way to do this would be to change the membership on the Legislative Services Commission to include specifically the majority and minority leadership of both houses, and giving it responsibility for performing the functions proposed for the Joint Committee.

2. Appoint a full-time director for the Joint Committee.

To be effective, we believe the coordinating committee should provide itself with a fulltime director. Committee members all hold other time-consuming positions and will have only limited time to devote to the work of this committee. Professional staff is necessary to provide the committee with the information that is necessary for it to be an effective body.

3. Make the Joint Committee responsible for the professional research staff.

The establishment of the Joint Committee provides the framework for resolving the organizational problems relating to the professional research staff serving the House and Senate. Overall responsibility for professional staff of the House and Senate should be placed under the direction of the Joint Committee -- as recommended by the League's 1968 report. Currently, each body, independent of the other, has its own research staff.

We recognize that the staffs of the House and Senate are today at different stages of development. For this reason it may be necessary to continue to assign some research personnel exclusively to either the House or the Senate for the near future. But unification of overall management of the staff means that common personnel practices and organizational structures can be developed now, thereby leading to full integration, eventually, of the two staffs.

Unification of the professional staff structure is important for several reasons:

- (1) The House and Senate are part of the same Legislature. Consequently, each has a strong interest in quality work conducted by the other body.
- (2) With unification, the same number of staff persons, now working separately, can avoid duplication of effort. It makes little sense for two persons -- one assigned to the Senate, and the other to the House -- to be working on the same issues and developing much the same material.
- (3) The ability of the research staff to assist legislators in more subject areas will be enhanced.
- (4) Unification of staffs undoubtedly will mean more effective use of tax revenues which are used for legislative support services.

(Statement adopted by the Citizens League Board of Directors, December 20, 1972 and is based on the recommendations contained in the League's report, "Organization for State Policy Making," issued February 16, 1968.)